



House of Representatives
Study Committee On Civics Education in Georgia

Recommendations Overview

Chairman Christian Coomer
Representative, 14th District

Members:

The Honorable Joyce Chandler
Representative, 105th District

The Honorable Brooks Coleman
Representative, 97th District

2017

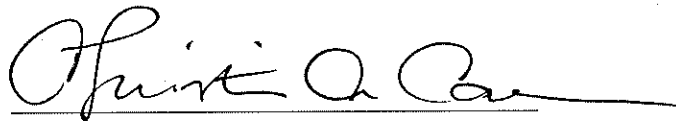
Prepared by the House Budget & Research Office

Introduction

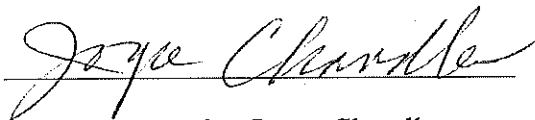
During the 2017 Session of the General Assembly, the Georgia House of Representatives created the Study Committee on Civics Education in Georgia with the passage of House Resolution 634. HR 634 acknowledged students' declining comprehension of civics topics and that decline's potential outcomes on democracy as a whole. The resolution requested that the committee review the current civics education standards within Georgia, the methods and standards for civics education utilized in other states, and the work of nonprofit education providers nationally.

As authorized by House Resolution 634, the membership of the committee consisted of three members as appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives. The members appointed by the speaker are the following: Representative Christian Coomer (14th District), Chair; Representative Joyce Chandler (105th District); and Representative Brooks Coleman (97th District).

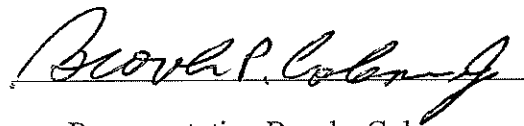
The committee held two hearings during 2017 on October 5 and November 28 at the State Capitol. The committee gathered testimony from members of the public and representatives of the Georgia Department of Education during each hearing.



Representative Christian Coomer, Chairman



Representative Joyce Chandler



Representative Brooks Coleman

Background

Georgia's civic participation is similar to the United States overall according to data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. During the 2016 presidential election, 60 percent of Georgia's citizens over the age of 18 voted, which is just below the national standard of 61 percent. In general, voter registration in Georgia falls close to the national average with 69 percent of citizens registered compared to 70 percent for the country as a whole.

States which demonstrate higher voter turnout among their qualified population (U.S. citizens over the age of 18) do not share discernable similarities by region, population, demographics, or general political representation. The state of Maine has the highest voter registration rate for qualified individuals at 80 percent. Following behind that is Mississippi with 78 percent of qualified individuals registered to vote.

Georgia's public schools follow the Georgia Standards of Excellence – Social Studies to determine curriculum and standards necessary for social studies and civic education. Aspects of good citizenship begin as early as kindergarten, and topics expand each academic year through high school. The Georgia Department of Education then provides that students take a U.S. History course which overviews important figures and events for the U.S. government and another course in American Government/Civics specifically.

Committee Hearings

Over the course of its two hearings, the committee was presented information from a number of members of the public. The first hearing included public testimony from Ken Craft, Cita Cook, Commissioner Nancy Jester, Jane Robins, Tonya Ditty, and Dr. Randell Trammell. Dr. Caitlin Dooley of the Department of Education spoke on the Standards of Excellence and how they are developed. Each member of the public emphasized the importance of civic education as parents, educators, and community members. The most stated desire from these members of the public is the need for greater transparency and notification from the Georgia Department of Education as it develops and reevaluates the Standards of Excellence for social studies and civic education.

During the second hearing, Marc Alan Urbach, Cita Cook, and Ken Craft testified as members of the public regarding the actions taken by other states and nonprofit organizations for civics education. Each echoed concern over the testing require by the Standards of Excellence, and spoke on a trend of states using the U.S. Immigration and Citizenship Exam as a part of public curriculum. Dr. Caitlin Dooley from the Georgia Department of Education returned to highlight the process for determining the Standards of Excellence which includes a public notification period and the agency's efforts to include input from both professional and public sources. The agency is in the process of determining whether it would be beneficial to include a civics education diploma seal for students who demonstrate a mastery of the material upon finishing school.

Committee Recommendations

Based on the testimony provided to the committee, the committee recommends the following changes be considered by the department and the General Assembly:

1. The department should ensure the widest reasonable dissemination of invitations to the public to participate in curriculum development. At a minimum, the department should notify each member of the General Assembly when it makes invitations for public participation.
2. The General Assembly should consider discontinuing participation in Advanced Placement programs that substitute curricula set by independent organizations for the curricula approved by the department through its ordinary public process. Abdicating control of curriculum selection to unaccountable private or semi-public entities is offensive to the sense of citizen-controlled curriculum selection that has been a hallmark of Georgia education policy.